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SUBJECT: Even Bureaucrats Want Change: Elite Poll Shows Surprises

Classified by Charge Constance Phlipot for Reasons 1.4 (B) & (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Head of the IISEPS polling service Oleg Manaev (protect) delivered his recent survey results to Ambassador on December 21. The two groups surveyed - thirty business leaders and thirty senior government officials Q responded similarly on most questions about the upcoming presidential elections, Belarus' relations with the West, the EU, and Russia, media and the overall situation in Belarus, but to varying degrees. The results indicated that although almost all of the participants were aware that Alexander Milinkevich would run against Lukashenko in the 2006 presidential elections, they still expect Lukashenko to win. Both groups would prefer EU membership over closer relations with Russia, and are against union with Russia. The business leaders and the government officials want change and felt that Belarus is proceeding in the wrong direction, but agreed that it is unlikely that an "orange revolution" like the one that happened in Ukraine would occur in Belarus. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On December 21, head of the IISEPS polling service Oleg Manaev (protect) gave Ambassador the results of his November-December survey. IISEPS polled 60 Belarusian "elites", 30 senior government employees from ministries and universities and 30 business leaders from the private sector. Manaev asked questions about the presidential elections, the European Union, domestic issues, media and Belarus' relations with Western countries and Russia. Below are the results.

2006 Presidential Elections

¶3. (SBU) Sixty percent of senior government employees and 93 percent of private sector individuals polled do not expect the 2006 presidential elections to be free or fair. While almost every participant had heard of 10+ Coalition candidate Alexander Milinkevich, few government employees and less than half of those in the private sector expect voters will support him, and most poll participants still expect Lukashenko to win the elections.

¶4. (SBU) "Do you think that the 2006 presidential election

will be free and fair?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	33%	7%
No	60	93

"Did you know that on October 1-2 in Minsk there was a Congress of Democratic Forces where the former vice-mayor and civil movement activist A. Milinkevich was chosen as the single candidate alternative to A. Lukashenko for the 2006 presidential elections?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	93%	100%
No	7	--

"Do you think voters will support A. Milinkevich in the 2006 presidential elections?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	7%	42%
No	60	23

"If the presidential elections were held tomorrow, for whom do you think the majority of the voters would vote?"

	Government	Private Sector
A. Lukashenko	73%	48%
A. Milinkevich	--	23
A. Kozulin	--	3
A. Lebedko	--	3
Another Candidate	7	3

European Union

15. (SBU) More than 78 percent of those polled think Belarus should become a member of the European Union (EU) and more than two-thirds of those polled would vote for EU membership for Belarus if there were a referendum tomorrow. However, only 23 percent of senior government officials feel that the standard of living for those in new EU member countries has increased, compared to 71 percent of private sector elites. Both groups indicated they would like more information about events in EU member countries.

16. (SBU) "In your opinion, should Belarus become a member of the European Union?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 77%	81%
No	16	16

"If there was a referendum tomorrow about Belarus entering the European Union, how would you vote?"

	Government	Private Sector
In favor	67%	84%
Against	13	3
I would not vote	3	3

"Do you believe the EU will become a political counterweight to the US?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 23%	23%
No	33	71

"On May 1, 2004, neighboring countries of Belarus (Poland,

Lithuania and Latvia) became members of the EU. Do you think that the standard of living for citizens in these countries became better or worse?"

	Government	Private Sector
Better	23%	71%
No Change	47	19
Worse	7	3

"Would you like to know more about what goes on in the EU member countries and more about the activities of European organizations?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 80%	90%
No	13	10

"Have you heard about the European new neighbor policy of neighbors, which guides relations between the European Union and its neighbors (including Belarus)?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 33%	77%
No	67	23

How Do You Relate to the West?

17. (SBU) Despite the negative reporting about the West in the Belarusian state media, 97 percent of business leaders and 83 percent of government elite do not feel that the West acts with hostility to Belarus. Even though the GOB has made it more difficult for students to study and work abroad, 100 percent of private sector employees and 90 percent of state employees consider such opportunities to be positive.

18. (SBU) "Do you think that the West acts with hostility towards Belarus and that Belarusians should fear this?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 7%	3%
No	83	97

"In your opinion, which society is the most just?"

	Government	Private Sector
German	60%	42%
American	13	48
Belarusian	13	3
Polish	7	--

"Belarusian citizens have the opportunity to study and receive training in European schools. What do you think about that?"

	Government	Private Sector
That's good	90%	100%
No opinion	3	--
That's bad	7	--

"Do you have friends, colleagues or partners abroad with whom you associate?" (You can choose more than one answer.)

	Government	Private Sector
Yes, in Russia	83%	77%
Yes, in Ukraine	63	74
Yes, in the Baltic states	40	55
Yes, in Poland	40	65

Yes, in various EU countries	40	71
Yes, in the USA	23	58
Yes, in other countries	20	35
No	10	3

Inside Belarus

¶9. (SBU) Ninety-seven percent of business leaders and 64 percent of government employees feel that Belarus is proceeding in the wrong direction. A similar numbers of participants would like to change the current situation in Belarus, but less than one-fourth think that an "orange revolution" will happen in Belarus. One question found a majority of both groups approved of international calls for Belarus to become more democratic.

¶10. (SBU) "Overall, is the situation in Belarus proceeding in the right or wrong direction?"

	Government	Private Sector
Wrong direction	64%	97%
Right direction	33	--

"Which is more important right now Q to maintain the current situation in the country or to change it?"

	Government	Private Sector
Change	63%	93%
Maintain	33	7

"In your opinion, is it possible for an "orange revolution" like the one in Ukraine to happen in Belarus?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	10%	26%
No	77	58

"In your opinion, how will the social-economic situation in Belarus change in the next few years?"

	Government	Private Sector
Worsen	30%	45%
No Change	47	29
Improve	23	26

"Not long ago, the EU Council of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO adopted a resolution calling on Belarusian authorities to respect democracy and human rights and promising to support democratic forces in our country. How do you react to that?"

	Government	Private Sector
Positively	Q	54%
With Indifference		33
Negatively		13

"Not long ago there was a government decree which significantly increased GOB control over the conducting of opinion polls and the publication of the results of opinion polls in the media. Do you support the introduction of such control?"

	Government	Private Sector
I do not support it: the study and formation of opinions should be free	77%	100%

I support it: authorities
should control the study
and formation of opinions

23

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Media

¶11. (SBU) Internet and Western and European media top the lists for most trusted media sources in both groups of surveyed participants. Only three percent of business leaders and 27 percent of senior state officials believe that the state media accurately portrays the activities of and life in Western countries. Eighty-one percent of private sector elite and 67 percent of government elite indicated they would like to receive more independent coverage from neighboring countries on what occurs in Belarus and the West. [Note: Manaev stressed the results showing more people than expected regularly watch Euronews. He also said that a recent poll of the Belarusian people (septel) also showed a surprising number watch Euronews regularly.]

"Which type of mass media do you trust most of all?" (You can choose more than one answer.)

	Government	Private Sector
Internet	57%	57%
European and Western media	30	48
Belarusian independent media	13	58
Belarusian state media	23	7
Russian media	20	--

¶12. (SBU) "In your opinion, does foreign radio accurately reflect life in Belarus?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	23%	55%
No	17	--

"Would you like to regularly receive independent radio and television programs from neighboring countries (Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia) covering events in Belarus and abroad?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	67%	81%
No	20	16

"In your opinion, does the Belarusian state media accurately cover the activities of Western states and life in Western states?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	27%	3%
No	66	97

"Would you watch the TV channel "Euronews" in Russian?"

	Government	Private Sector
Everyday	40%	52%
Several times per week	20	32
Several times per month	17	6
Several times per year	10	--
I don't watch TV	13	10

Union of Belarusian Poles

¶13. (SBU) While the private sector leaders overwhelmingly fault the GOB for the conflict involving the Union of

Belarusian Poles and view it as a means for the GOB to control the union, the government elite chose more diverse reasons and sources of the conflict.

¶14. (SBU) "You certainly heard about the conflict involving the Union of Belarusian Poles (UBP), which led to a sharp decline in relations between our country and Poland. In your opinion, what was the reason for this conflict?" (You may choose more than one answer.)

	Government	Private Sector
GOB wishes to keep UBP under its control	40%	87%
The reason was purely financial: the old and new leadership of the UBP did not share its money	13	7
Interference of Poland and other Western countries into the internal affairs of Belarus	7	--
Ministry of Justice determined that the UBP Congress was not properly conducted	3	--
Other Reasons	3	--

"In your opinion, who is to blame for this conflict?"

	Government	Private Sector
GOB	50%	90%
UBP Leadership	33	13
Polish authorities	20	16
European Union	--	13
USA	--	7

Travel Outside of Belarus

¶15. (SBU) All of the private sector elite have traveled to an EU country in the past five years as compared to a little more than half of the government elite. Germany, Poland, the Baltic states, and France top the lists for most traveled to countries for both groups.

¶16. (SBU) "In the past five years, have you been to an EU country?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 57%	100%
No	43	--

"If you have been to an EU country in the past five years, which one did you travel to?"

	Government	Private Sector
Germany	33%	81%
Poland	23	71
The Baltic states	17	68
France	13	36
Sweden	3	29
Czech Republic	10	19
The Netherlands	3	13
Austria	7	7
Belgium	--	13
Hungary	3	10
Spain	--	10
Greece	7	--
Italy	-	7
Luxembourg	-	7
Slovakia	7	--
Cyprus	--	3
Denmark	--	3

Russian-Belarusian Relations

¶17. (SBU) Ninety-seven percent of private sector elite and 60 percent of government elite would choose EU membership over a union with Russia. Most would abstain from voting or vote against further integration with Russia if presented with a referendum on the issue. Yet, almost two-thirds of government leaders envision Belarus being closer to Russia than to the EU in ten years, whereas the business leaders predict that the opposite situation will happen.

¶18. (SBU) "If you could choose between a Union with Russia or becoming an EU member, which would you choose?"

	Government	Private Sector
EU member	60%	97%
Union with Russia	33	3

"It is possible that in the near future there will be referendum in Belarus and Russia, which will allow for even more integration between the two governments. How would you vote?"

	Government	Private Sector
In favor	37%	7%
Against	43	61
I would not vote	13	29

"To whom will Belarus be closer in ten years, Russia or the EU?"

	Government	Private Sector
EU	33%	65%
Russia	Q 64	32

"In your opinion, do the Russian authorities want Belarus to enter into the Union and stop being an independent state?"

	Government	Private Sector
Yes	Q 80%	67%
No	7	23

Comment

¶19. (C) This poll provides a rare view of the opinions of Belarus' normally tight-lipped elite. It reveals that the private sector elite, and even second and third tier government elite, are surprisingly open to the West and dissatisfied with Lukashenko's rule. They reject union with Russia, prefer the EU, are unhappy with the path their country is taking, and many would even vote for an opposition presidential candidate. However, they are also pragmatists, not believing that things will change soon. Polls like this show there are weaknesses in Lukashenko's regime that could be exploited, and also explain why Lukashenko, to keep the people from knowing what they think, is attempting to control all opinion polling (IISEPS itself was closed in April and now is registered in Vilnius and operates underground in Belarus).

PHLIPOT